

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

**This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:**

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1. (original): A belt member, comprising a seam portion formed by overlapping and adhering both longitudinal end portions thereof to constitute an endless belt stretched and circulated by a rotative, first stretching member and a second stretching member,

wherein a length of the seam portion is no less than a length between a first point at which the endless belt is separated from one of the first stretching member and the second stretching member and a second point at which the endless belt is brought into contact with the other one of the first stretching member and the second stretching member.

2. (original): An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
the belt member as set forth in claim 1;  
a photosensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon; and  
a transfer member, operable to transfer the toner image from the photosensitive member onto a recording medium transported by the belt member.

3. (original): An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
the belt member as set forth in claim 1;  
a photosensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon;

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a primary transfer device, operable to transfer a toner image from the photosensitive member onto the belt member; and

a secondary transfer device, operable to transfer the toner image from the belt member onto a recoding medium.

4. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 3, further comprising a third stretching member and fourth stretching member which are arranged such that a circulating path of the belt member is made trapezoidal.

5. (original): An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
the belt member as set forth in claim 1;  
a heat generator, provided with the first stretching member; and  
a fixing member, arranged so as to abut against the first stretching member through the belt member, so that a toner image formed on a recording medium is fixed thereon when the recording medium is placed at a nip portion between the fixing member and the belt member.

6. (canceled).

7. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 5, further comprising:

a photo sensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon; and

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a transfer member, operable to transfer the toner image from the photosensitive member onto a recording medium which is to be transported to the nip position.

8. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 5, further comprising:

a photosensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon;

an intermediate transfer member;

a primary transfer device, operable to transfer a toner image from the photosensitive member onto the intermediate transfer member; and

a secondary transfer device, operable to transfer the toner image from the intermediate transfer member onto a recording medium which is to be transported to the nip portion.

9. (original): An image forming apparatus, comprising:

the belt member as set forth in claim 1; and

a fixing member, provided with a heat generator and arranged so as to abut against the first stretching member through the belt member, so that a toner image formed on a recording medium is fixed thereon when the recording medium is placed at a nip portion between the fixing member and the belt member.

10. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 9, further comprising:

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a photo sensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon; and  
a transfer member, operable to transfer the toner image from the photosensitive member  
onto a recording medium which is to be transported to the nip position.

11. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 9, further  
comprising:

a photosensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon;  
an intermediate transfer member;  
a primary transfer device, operable to transfer a toner image from the photosensitive  
member onto the intermediate transfer member; and  
a secondary transfer device, operable to transfer the toner image from the intermediate  
transfer member onto a recoding medium which is to be transported to the nip portion.

12. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 9, wherein the  
second stretching member has a semiannular shape.

13. (original): The belt member as set forth in claim 1, wherein the belt member is  
wound by a plurality of turns so that the length of the seam portion is made no less than a  
circumference of the endless belt.

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14. (original): The belt member as set forth in claim 13, wherein the belt member is formed with a stepped portion through which both longitudinal ends of the belt member oppose to each other in a circumferential direction of the endless belt.

15. (currently amended): An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
a rotative, first ~~stretching~~ stretching member;  
a second stretching member;  
a belt member, comprising a seam portion formed by overlapping and adhering both longitudinal end portions thereof to constitute an endless belt stretched and circulated by the first stretching member and the second stretching member;

a fixing member, provided with a heat generator and arranged so as to abut against the first stretching member and the second stretching member through the belt member, so that a toner image formed on a recording medium is fixed thereon when the recording medium is placed at a nip portion between the fixing member and the belt member;

wherein a length of the seam portion is no less than a length between a first point at which the fixing member is abutted against the first stretching member through the belt member and a second point at which the fixing member is abutted against the second stretching member through the belt member.

16. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 15, wherein the second stretching member has a semiannular shape.

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17. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 15, further comprising:

- a photo sensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon; and
- a transfer member, operable to transfer the toner image from the photosensitive member onto a recording medium which is to be transported to the nip position.

18. (original): The image forming apparatus as set forth in claim 15, further comprising:

- a photosensitive member, operable to support a toner image thereon;
- an intermediate transfer member;
- a primary transfer device, operable to transfer a toner image from the photosensitive member onto the intermediate transfer member; and
- a secondary transfer device, operable to transfer the toner image from the intermediate transfer member onto a recoding medium which is to be transported to the nip portion.